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MANIPULATING THE READER'S REVULSION AT THE BIAS OF A CLUMSY ATTACK IS NOW AN ESTABLISHED TECHNIQUE OF POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

11/01/2017 Michael Eden Society



Methods of propaganda used today have well overtaken the public immunity to manipulation.

Writing in the Guardian recently (15th Nov 2016) Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, Jacqueline Rose presents a different figure to the hand-wringing liberal academic I drew attention to in my previous article, but her taste for apology is nonetheless telling:

There is a problem with the tendency among those of us opposed to Trump to disparage his supporters as mere bigots – misogynists, racists, “deplorables” in Clinton’s unfortunate expression – even if, or especially if, somewhere that also feels true. This tendency makes the mistake of claiming possession of the house of reason, as if no ugly thought or hateful impulse has ever entered our own hearts and minds. It makes a false claim of innocence. It consigns swaths of the US population to darkness, repeating in that moment its own version of the crude, exclusive, denigrating polarities from which we all have most to fear ¹

Compare this with quotations taken from her addresses to the Birkbeck Critical Theory School in July 2016:

“However important a role women might be playing on the political stage, indeed as one way of countering that role, men only ever really do business with each other. Indeed, they must be seen as only ever doing business (friendly or angry – it is the intimacy that counts) with each other,”

“It is the curse of masculinity that men are expected to shed any sign of vulnerability, to hold themselves erect as they strut across the world’s stage, above all behave as if they have always, with no flicker of doubt, believed in themselves” ²

Still fighting the old Generation X war against the patriarchy, even when it fuels the flames of the enemy? Where is the criticality? Let me hold a mirror up to this kind of method.

What I am about to write I write only as an example to undermine Rose’s reasoning, it does not express my actual thoughts.

Sarah Palin has strutted onto the public/political stage like many ill-prepared women who think that they can maximise their popularity because a slice of the populous find them strangely attractive. Palin’s shrewdest move was to refer to herself as a pit-bull with lipstick. It’s as close to manipulation as a middle class soccer mom can get, and is meant to convince the frumps intimidated by the career types that she too is like them (under the yoga fit body and nicely conditioned hair).

It’s a trait of women that they have to strategize in this way, always scheming and second guessing instead of just saying what they really think. When Palin is pushed her answers betray another typical feminine problem: that she hasn’t done the hard work, isn’t up to scratch, and doesn’t know what she’s talking about!

Do you see? Any legitimate criticism of a power hungry, right wing, gun loving politician is lost, because any rational person can see that what’s really worrying is the bias and sexism of the writer.

It isn’t out of a defensive feeling that I make this point, only that in writing like this Rose both misunderstands (and simplifies) masculinity, and only delivers a glancing blow to her target. I know that Rose admires Freud, I wonder what he would say about her couching her arguments like this?

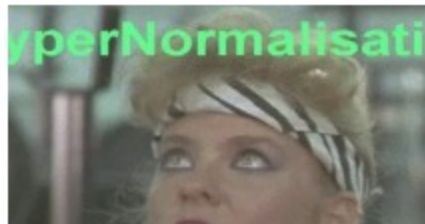
For the record, what Rose describes in the politicians above is low character, not the ‘real man’ ideal (which is far harder to undermine, and is what the men she dislikes are unable to live up to). In this way her argument takes on the approach of a heckler who, under no pressure, makes the odd funny comment. Whilst this is effective at embarrassing the performer who, under the pressure and scrutiny of the audience, looks stupid, the problem with this is that men who otherwise might have agreed with her will pity her targets.

Similarly, a woman reading what I wrote about Palin might ignore any real criticism and think instead about how hard it is for women to break into the public world of politics and make their way under the scrutiny of the public.

This kind of posturing venom might make a person seem edgy, but really it isn’t very clever at all and it traps us in a loop, making powerful people seem tragic and sympathetic.

Image by Pixabay/Alexa_fotos

¹Rose, Donald Trump’s victory is a disaster for modern masculinity, www.theguardian.com.
²Rose, The twin curse of masculinity and male-dominated politics helped create Brexit, www.theguardian.com.



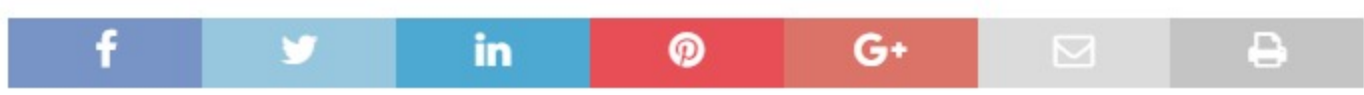
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Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.



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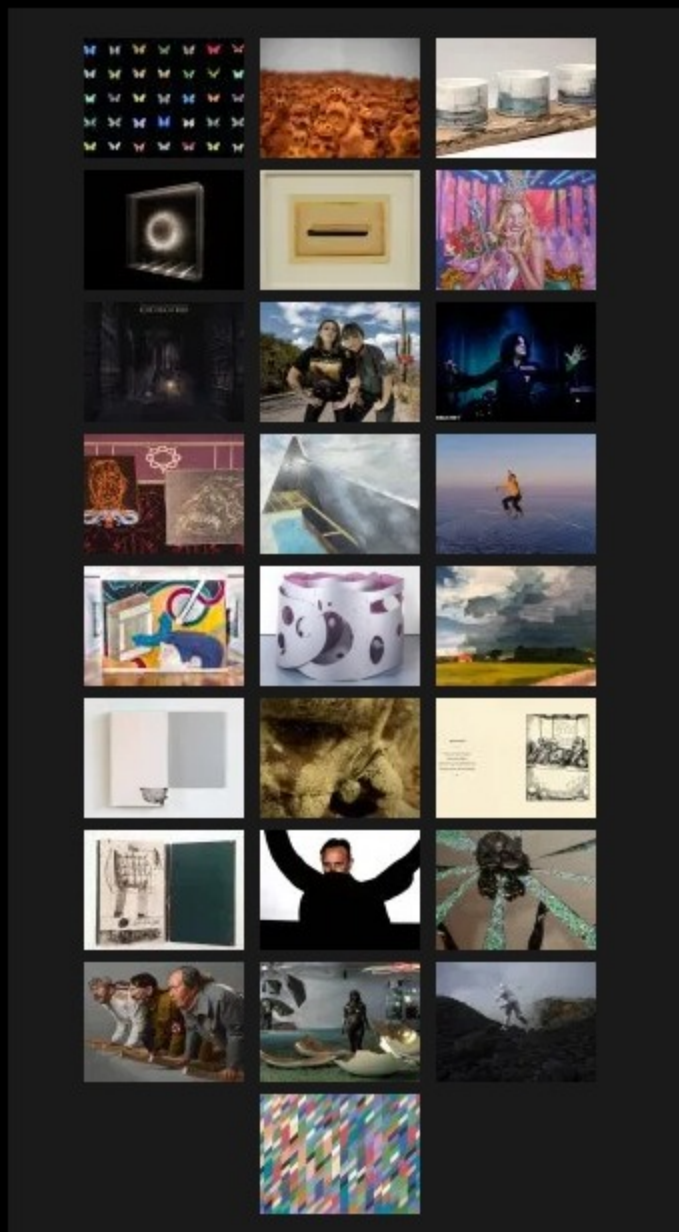
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